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# Light

...on a New World

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Cover picture: Spring Time in London



# God's time



THE CONCEPT OF time has exercised the minds of brilliant scientists like Einstein and it is still the subject of debate. Time is abstract - it cannot be detected by our senses. However by observing movement like the hands of a clock we can distinguish one point or moment from another and use this as a form of measurement with which to regulate our lives and record our actions.

Time as we have defined it, is related to the rotation of the earth upon its axis to provide us with day and night. The rotation of the moon around the earth gives us months and the orbit of the earth around the sun records the years. How encouraging then it is to read that in spite of gloomy forecasts over environmental issues, the Bible tells us of God's promise *'While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease'* [Genesis 8.22].

Due to of the regularity of these planetary movements, we are able to make watches and clocks which have been designed to track them and by precision in manufacture these time pieces can record the division of time with great accuracy. To believe that the man-made watch has all the hallmarks of design and precise planning, yet at the same time believe that the God-made movement it records is random chance, is absurd, as both must be viewed in identical standards of inquiry and observation.

We cannot see time and yet we experience it by observation – for time is an experience of movement, as Leonardo da Vinci said: *'Movement gives shape to all forms. Structure gives form to all movement.'* This was his way of saying that a link exists between time and motion, for things only have dimension by some form of movement. If time is recognised by movement and observation we can understand that a person with loss of memory loses

their perception of time because they have no comparison with the present.

### THE LIMITATIONS OF MAN COMPARED WITH GOD

Our whole experience is one of limitations and our concept of time is one of these inhibiting factors which makes it very difficult for us to understand that God *'lives forever'* [Isaiah 57.15 NIV]. As Moses put it in his prayer recorded in Psalm 90 *'from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God'* [Psalm 90.2]. Our minds find this as difficult to grasp as the vastness of space and the distances involved to those stars which are furthest away and indeed might even now be a spent force by the time their light reaches us. So straight away we see the great truth which lies behind the findings of scientists; that our time experiences are only a part of something greater and more far reaching, an extra dimension.

To God time does not exist, yet in his dealings with mankind time has been introduced like a giant grid system. This encompasses the history of man from the beginning with the creation of Adam and Eve, to the establishment of God's kingdom when, as we read in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, everything will be perfectly balanced and controlled and *'God may be all in all.'* [1 Corinthians 15.28]

Within these parameters the Almighty has seen fit to provide details of His plan and demonstrate that a way exists for individuals to participate in the long-term strategy. The Scriptures are therefore provided for this purpose and whilst they may not answer every question we may have, they nevertheless provide sufficient information for a person with faith to believe His Word.

### MILESTONES IN THE CREATION

In God's timetable definitive milestones have been provided so that the Bible student can detect the passage of man's time by Divine intervention. This is achieved by prophecies concerning people, events and nations. Perhaps the greatest moment in history was the birth of Jesus. The Apostle Paul reminded his first century hearers:

*'But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.'*

*[Galatians 4.4]*

This event and its consequences will be matched by only one other future notable happening, again spoken of by Paul as he addressed a gathering in Athens:

‘...(God) hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead’ [*Acts 17.31*].

So the difference between God the Creator of all things and His creation is that during our lives everything we experience has its limitations, whereas God knows no bounds. A consequence of the limited way in which we see the progression of time is referred to as ‘The second law of Thermodynamics’. It says: ‘The entropy (or disorder) in the universe tends to a minimum’ or in other words, things left to themselves break down and disintegrate – they never build up or improve. The wonderful thing is that God Himself is not subject to the laws which He has created for mankind. He does not have limitations or constraint and therefore is not bound by time, for as Jesus said to his Father, *with God all things are possible*’ [*Mark 10.27*].

In the Scriptures we learn not only of God’s immortality, but also that He is present everywhere and knows everything that is going on, which is what you would expect of a Creator who made and had the vision to create the intricacies of all life. As the Psalmist put it:

‘O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar’ [*Psalm 139.2 NIV*].

The Psalmist then asked the question:

‘Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?’ [*Psalm 139.7 NIV*]

In fact the whole of Psalm 139 is well worth reading for we are humbly reminded of our limitations and of the greatness of God in all senses of the word.



## WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Our thoughts naturally lead us to conclude that our whole experience in life is bounded by constraint within a time zone, which is an artificial element introduced into the world both by and because of our human nature and mortality. This has been the curse of man since Eden and will be swept aside in the kingdom of God, as time will lose its meaning to a population of immortal people.

Outside our sphere of activity, God looks upon His creation without the limitation of finite time and views it rather like the scientists' illustration of the time train. If you were high enough to be far away above the earth, then you could observe both the start and the finish of a train journey at the same time, but the passengers see only a time sequence of events along the route. But how can we imagine eternity which is God's time? The simple answer is that we cannot, any more than an insect whose life span is a day would be able to grasp the significance of day and night, or a butterfly understand the seasons to realize that they rotate.

## THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

So we find in Scripture that the Almighty has tried to give us some indication of the vastness of eternity, when as Peter records *'one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day'* [2 Peter 3.8]. James, the Lord's brother also had an interesting way of reminding us of the relationship of time for us and time in its limitless form:

'For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away' [James 4.14].

This principle of a day being represented by 1,000 years in God's eyes is a concept which the Almighty has introduced from the very beginning. When we read of Creation in the early chapters of Genesis we note that the work of Creation took six days and on the seventh day He rested. So with God's plan, we find that it is to unfold over 6,000 years with Jesus ruling for 1,000 years after his return to the earth. This seventh period is called the *Millennium* and is spoken of in Revelation: *'they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years'* [Revelation 20.6], after which the earth will only have an immortal population.

It is interesting for the Bible student to recognise that from Adam to Noah is approximately 1,000 years, with Abraham being born 1,000 years later around 2,000 BC. King David, another notable character in God's plan, was born about 1,000 years after Abraham and the Lord Jesus Christ was born after another period of 1,000 years had elapsed. How exciting then to realise as we have now passed the year AD 2,000 that six periods of 1,000 years will have elapsed and if we relate this to the Creation, then we must be very close to witnessing the return to the earth of Jesus, with the establishment of the kingdom of God for him to rule for the seventh period of 1,000 years.

Whilst we wait for Jesus we must recognize that time is infinite and our finite experiences do not in any way limit God who knows no bounds. Our whole thinking process is influenced by our environment and concept of time, but we must not be guilty of applying the same standards to our Creator. As the prophet Isaiah says:

'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.' [Isaiah 55.8,9]

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## FREE BIBLE COURSE

The Bible Correspondence Course is in two parts. The first part gives a basic outline of what the Bible contains and its message. The second part is a more detailed study of the important Bible teaching concerning God's plan of salvation and the Christian way of life. The course is free of charge and the first lesson can be obtained by sending an Email or writing to the Correspondence Secretary at the address shown on the inside back cover.

# Plants of the Bible

## The Phragmites Reed

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THE REED, WHICH grows along riverbanks and on marshes in Norfolk, England, has been used for centuries as a high-quality, organic material for thatching buildings, giving long-lasting, weather-resisting and decorative roofs lasting up to 80 years - double the life of straw thatch. The hollow stems trap air, which gives good insulation in cold weather and a cool interior in hot weather.

The popularity of reed for thatching extended proportionately during the last century with the increased use of combine harvesters; they produce short straw, as distinct from the thatcher's long straw resulting from the older system of threshing whole sheaves of wheat.

The rhizomes (rootstock) of this reed grow and spread to form thick mats - a characteristic which makes it invaluable for stabilizing the banks of rivers and canals and, as used in the reclamation of polders in the Netherlands where it stabilised the mud. This reed also is grown in Europe for the manufacture of cellulose.

Botanically known as '*Phragmites australis*', it is a member of the grass family '*Poaceae*', as is easily recognised from its plume-like flowers. It is Britain's largest grass. Found worldwide in suitably aquatic terrain from the Arctic to the Tropics, it was common in Bible lands.

In Biblical times, it was used extensively in house construction and as a hedge plant marking field boundaries. Mats and basketry were fabricated from it, as were short lengths for arrows and also for flutes. Also, it was used as a standard of measurement.



Usually growing to around 5 feet (1.5m), it may approach 16.5 feet (5m) in tropical climes. The graceful, thin, bamboo-like canes, with their feathery plumes, sway and bow down towards the water when wind blows over them, producing a murmuring sound, particularly on ripening in golden profusion in the autumn.

However, such tallness is its Achilles heel, making it vulnerable to damage by extra-strong winds. In Biblical language, *'a reed shaken with the wind'* indicates a person liable to be blown off course by every wind of doctrine. In sharp contrast, Jesus declared John the Baptist was not such a person but had proclaimed him right from the start as the Messiah who should come: *'Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, "What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?"'* [Matthew 11.7]. There was no outward show in John; he was a simple man, devoid of sartorial elegance; it was his unshakeable message of the Jesus to come that he promoted, not himself.

Elsewhere in the Bible we are told of a broken or bruised reed denoting a person of weak character, someone not to be trusted. *'thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt, on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt unto all that trust on him'* [2 Kings 18.21; see also Isaiah 36.6].

There is also a prophecy of Israel being taken into Babylon as captives, featuring a reed. *'...the LORD shall smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water, and he shall root up Israel out of this good land, which he gave to their fathers, and shall scatter them beyond the river, because they have made their groves, provoking the LORD to anger'* [1 Kings 14.15].

In the prophecy of Ezekiel there is a description of a reed being the standard of measurement. *'And he brought me thither, and, behold, there was a man, ...with a line of flax in his hand, and a measuring reed'* [Ezekiel 40.3]. This was an ancient dimension of length, approximately equal to the length of a forearm, the standard length of a reed. *'I saw also the height of the house round about: the foundations of the side chambers were a full reed of six great cubits'* [Ezekiel 41.8].

The prophet Isaiah looked forward and described accurately, in symbol,

the gentle nature of the promised Messiah. '***A bruised reed** shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench*' [Isaiah 42.3].

Whereas a **bruised reed** may be broken very easily and a flickering flax quickly quenched, the gentle Jesus would be meek and mild, showing tenderness and love, aiming to strengthen weak hands and stabilise feeble knees, offering comfort to mourners and encouraging those with fearful hearts.

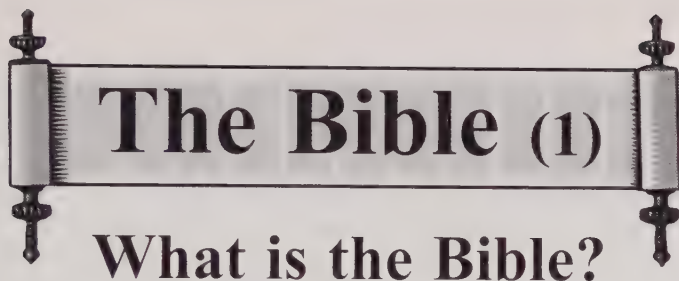
Sadly, in due time he was rejected as an impostor. His tormentors mocked him by presenting a **reed** to him as a symbol of royalty. '*And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!*' [Matthew 27.29].

However, he will return in fulfilment of many Bible prophecies including the Revelation that he gave to the Apostle John, ushering in the time when there shall be a New Jerusalem. This book also speaks of a **reed** as a measure but this time it is a golden one, epitomising the indestructibility of the kingdom of God that Jesus Christ will establish at his Second Coming. '*And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof*' [Revelation 21.15].

What a change then from the corrupted earth of today! The prophet Isaiah foretold the time when '*the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass **with reeds** and rushes*' [Isaiah 35.7].

So, we pray, '*Even so, come, Lord Jesus*' [Revelation 22.20].

Don Smith  
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# The Bible (1)

## What is the Bible?

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*'I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word' [Psalm 119.16].*

THE BIBLE IS regarded as the 'Holy Book' of the Christian Religion, just as the Koran is thought of as the basis of Islam. In this issue of 'Light' we are publishing the first two articles in a series which is planned to look at the Bible as a book. The series will consider where it came from, how we got it in its present form and to think about the influence it should have, its authority and whether it has a message for us today.

Most Christian homes have a Bible. It is still the world's best seller in English, but sadly, it seems to be less and less read. We hope this series of articles will encourage our readers to study what is not only an important book, but also one that should have a real influence on our thinking and behaviour.

### LOOK AT THE BOOK

Find your Bible and look at it – as if you had not seen it before. On the spine there are probably the words, 'HOLY BIBLE'. Both are words which we use almost without thinking what they mean.

The word '**Bible**' is related to the Greek word '*biblios*' and we find the first part of the word in our word '**bibliography**' which means a book list – usually a list of books related to a particular subject. The word 'Bible' means 'books; collection of books; library'.

The word '**Holy**,' means 'consecrated, sacred; morally and spiritually perfect; belonging to, commissioned by or devoted to God' (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*). This word is also used (because of its derivation) to mean 'special' or 'set apart for a special purpose'.



So the title of the book we are looking at really means that it is a special library or a collection of books – commissioned by God, set apart for a particular purpose. One of the purposes of this series of articles is to try to understand why the Bible is special and what makes it special. It is certainly not just one book, but a collection of books.

Open the Bible and look at the index at the front. You will see the titles of all the separate booklets, which make up the whole Bible. They are divided into two groups: 39 in the section called the Old Testament and 27 in the part called the New Testament. The books of the Old Testament were all written before the time of Christ and the New Testament books after the time of Christ in the first century AD. Practically the whole of the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and the New Testament was written in Greek. So the whole of the Bible has had to be translated so that we can read it in English, French, Telugu, Ewe, Russian, or in whatever language we speak.

*'Car Dieu a tellement aimé le monde qu'il a donné son  
Fils unique, afin que tout homme qui croit en lui ne  
meure pas mais qu'il ait la vie éternelle'.*

In the box above we read John chapter 3 verse 16 in French (EFC Version), not only spoken in France but also in various African countries and in other parts of the world.

If we now turn the pages of the Bible we will find the books are of different length and many of them have strange names – **Genesis**, **Deuteronomy**, **Habakkuk** and **Malachi** for example in the Old Testament and **Thessalonians**, **Philemon** and **Revelation** in the New Testament. Some of these words are the opening Hebrew words of the books:

**Genesis** means the beginning and the opening words of the book are *'In the beginning...'* Exodus is linked to our word 'Exit' and means the 'way out'. The book tells about the way in which the Hebrew people were brought out of Egypt and what happened afterwards.

Other titles of books are the names of teachers or leaders or others who wrote the books. **Malachi** and **Habakkuk** are the names of prophets

(teachers) as are **Isaiah**, **Jeremiah** and **Ezekiel**. You can usually tell why the book is so called by looking at the opening verses of the book.

In the New Testament, most of us know the names of the first four books. They are the names of the writers who recorded the four accounts of the life and work and teaching of Jesus – **Matthew**, **Mark**, **Luke** and **John**. Most of the other booklets are letters named after the writers – like **Peter** or **James**.

Some are named after the groups of Christians to whom they were written. For example, **Ephesians** is a letter written to Christians at Ephesus by the Apostle Paul. **Philippians** is the name of the letter by the same writer to Christians at Philippi.

**The Book of Revelation** is different. It is an account of the visions that were given to the Apostle John at the end of his life when he was in exile on the Island of Patmos. It begins: *'The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw – that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ'* [Revelation 1.1 NIV].

### ALREADY SOMETHING SPECIAL

If we study the various books of the Bible carefully we find that about 40 different people were involved as writers. They wrote while living in various countries – Mesopotamia, Greece, Egypt, Italy and, of course, Israel. The books were also written over a long period of time – about 1,500 years. The Bible, then, in a very real sense is not just one book, but a library. It is because this collection is bound together for convenience, that it is often printed on very thin paper, to make the book manageable. The fact that we do have all these separate writings bound together in one volume is certainly one thing that makes it different and rather special.

### THE ARRANGEMENT OF THE BOOKS

For ease of reference we usually group the books of the Bible as follows:

## OLD TESTAMENT

- **The Law**

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

These first five books are sometimes called 'The Pentateuch', a word which means the 'five' books which are also called 'The Books of Moses'. In the Hebrew Scripture these books are called the Torah.

- **Historical Books**

Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, I and II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther.

These books describe the history of Israel from the death of Moses to the establishment of the kingdom under Saul, David and Solomon; then the division of the Kingdom into the northern Israel and the southern Judah. Both kingdoms were eventually conquered and the people taken into exile. Only Judah was allowed to return from captivity. The return is described in the books called by the names of Ezra and Nehemiah.

- **Poetic Books**

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon.

The Psalms are, in fact, divided into five 'mini books'.

- **The Prophets**

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi

The opening verses of these books will usually say at which period of history the prophets preached.



## NEW TESTAMENT

- **The Gospels**

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The Gospel writers tell us about the birth of Jesus, his ministry and teaching, his crucifixion and resurrection.

- **History**

Acts

The full name is 'The Acts of the Apostles' and the book describes the spread of Christianity and the missionary journeys of Paul.

- **Letters**

Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

These were written by Paul to the new churches.

1 and 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon

These were written by Paul to individuals

Hebrews

Written to the Jewish Christians particularly

James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John and Jude

Other letters by the writers by whose name they are called

- **Prophecy**

Revelation

Visions seen by John exiled on the Island of Patmos

# The Bible (2)

## The beginnings of the Bible

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THE OLD TESTAMENT books were completed about 400 years before the birth of Jesus and this collection of books, the Jewish Scriptures, was regarded as sacred. The order of books is different from ours and they are grouped differently, too. The Jews called the sections of the Scriptures, the Law (the first five books), the Writings and the Prophets. There is an interesting reference to this in Jeremiah.

### THE WORK OF JEREMIAH



The prophet Jeremiah had an unpopular message to preach. The people of the kingdom of Judah were set a bad example by their rulers. There was corruption in government circles and in many areas God's laws were completely disregarded. Jeremiah spoke against this state of affairs and as a result became hated for his outspokenness. The rulers and officials planned to have Jeremiah arrested and the book of Jeremiah records what they said. They felt that right was on their side – after all, they were the rulers and they said:

‘...Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, and let us

smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words' [Jeremiah 18.18].

In other words they said: *'Our priests have the Law, we also have the Books of Wisdom (the Writings) and the words of the Prophets. So the Bible is on our side. Let us plot the downfall of Jeremiah'*.

Their attitude was like that of the Pharisees in the days of Jesus, *'You ought not to speak like that to us. We are the descendants of Abraham'*. Jesus replied that if God wanted to, He could raise up children to Abraham, *'From these very stones'*.

The teaching is clear. What is important is that the Pharisees should not rely on their line of descent, but should copy Abraham's example. It is no good claiming to have the Bible unless we read it and put its teaching into practice. This was not being done either by the rulers at Jeremiah's time or by those in Jesus' day.

The reason we have referred to the passage in Jeremiah is to show that even at this time, before the captivity of Judah by Babylon, the books of the Jewish Scriptures were already being grouped as they were in New Testament times.

### THE CLAIM OF THE BIBLE

If we look at the books of the Old and New Testaments we find many verses where the writers claim to be writing the words of God:

*'The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiyah, of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin: to whom **the word of the LORD** came in the days of Josiah...'* [Jeremiah 1.1,2].

*'Moreover **the word of the LORD** came to me, saying...'* [Jeremiah 2.1].

*'**The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD**, saying...'* [Jeremiah 7.1].

*'Hear ye **the word which the LORD speaketh** unto you, O house of Israel: **Thus saith the LORD**, Learn not the way of the heathen ...'* [Jeremiah 10 1,2].

The examples above are all taken from the book of Jeremiah, to make it



easy to look them up; but look at any of the books of the prophets and there are many examples of the same claim.

### THESE CLAIMS CONFIRMED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

When Jesus was preaching, he often backed up his argument by appealing to the authority of the Jewish Scriptures, our Old Testament. *'Have ye never read...'* he said on many occasions. And again: *'why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, Honour your father and mother [Matthew 15. 3,4 NIV].'*

Jesus is quoting here from the book of Exodus (in the Law) which, he says, is the Word of God. He quotes from the Psalms (in the Writings) and the Prophets in the same way.

When talking to his disciples after the resurrection, he explained to them that what had happened to him – his arrest, his suffering, crucifixion, death and resurrection – were all part of the purpose of God. *'And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself' [Luke 24. 27 NIV].'*

The Old Testament books claim to be the Word of God and Jesus referred to them and quoted them as God's Word.

### THE TESTIMONY OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

Paul reminded the young man Timothy that right from being a little boy he had been brought up to know the Jewish Scriptures. They would tell him about:

**Doctrine:** the word means 'teaching', so this meant that the Scriptures would tell him what he should believe;

**Reproof:** they would tell him when he was choosing the wrong path;

**Correction:** he could learn how to put himself right again;

**Instruction in righteousness:** the Scriptures can tell us how we can live our lives in the way that will please God.

Paul said to Timothy that the reason the Scriptures are able to do this for us, is because they were inspired by God:

‘And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.’

[2 Timothy 3.15-17]

### WHAT DOES INSPIRATION MEAN?

The word ‘*inspiration*’ means that the writers wrote because God had ‘*breathed into*’ them. He had breathed His message into them and they wrote His words. Peter wrote:

‘no prophecy of the Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit’

[2 Peter 1. 20,21 NIV].

The words ‘*carried along*’ are very strong in the original Greek from which our New Testament is translated. The Greek means ‘*carried irresistibly along*’. The writers **had** to write what they were inspired to write. The prophet Jeremiah again, is a good example of this. Because of his unpopular message, he was arrested, imprisoned, put in the stocks and on one occasion lowered into a miry dungeon. The result of this was that he made up his mind that, if this is how I am going to be treated: if this is what will happen as a result of my preaching – then I will stop. ‘*I will not speak any more in God’s name*’. But, he says,

‘...if I say, “I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,” his word is in my heart like a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed I cannot.’

[Jeremiah 20. 9 NIV]

Jeremiah was unable to stop himself speaking the message he was inspired to speak. That is what Peter meant by, *'Holy men of God spake as they were moved'* [AV], *'carried along'* [NIV], *'impelled by the Holy Spirit'* [NEB].

## THE NEW TESTAMENT

The verses and the claims we have looked at apply to the Old Testament and we have concentrated on this part of the Bible because many Christians already accept the New Testament as originating from God but will question the inspiration of the Old Testament. The Bible itself does not distinguish between the Old and New Testaments in this way.

Peter says that although Paul wrote many things that are hard to understand, his writings have the same authority as the Old Testament Scriptures. In Peter's second letter, he wrote of Paul's teaching about salvation and the suffering and patience of Christ. He says that Paul wrote with God-given wisdom.

'He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things which are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures.'

[2 Peter 3.14-16 NIV]

Peter speaks of Paul's writing as having the same authority as *'the other Scriptures'*. In other words, they are Scriptures also.

Paul himself wrote to the Christians at Thessalonica: *'we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe'* [1Thessalonians 2. 13 NIV].

In the next issue of Light, the third article in this series will look at the fascinating story of translating the Bible - from the Old Testament Hebrew manuscripts and the New Testament writings in Greek, to the Bible we can read in English today.

Michael Walker  
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# Basic Bible Teaching

## Sin and its Consequences

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FROM AN EARLY age most children are taught to be responsible for their actions. In life we must learn, even at a young age, the difference between right and wrong. If we get things wrong we must face the consequences and be corrected by our parents or guardians. Only by doing this do we eventually grow into responsible adults.

Perhaps this seems all too simple - even stating the obvious. But then '*back to the basics*' was what the politicians were advocating a few years ago, but when they took a step back and looked at themselves and their colleagues, not all was as it should have been - far from it. The purpose of this article is to ask you the reader to take a step back and look at yourself.

This current series of articles entitled 'Basic Bible Teaching,' is just that - basic teaching from God's Word. Nothing difficult, it is teaching from God, which if ignored, will have fatal consequences for each one of us. As with our earthly parents or guardians, God our Father in heaven, wants each one of us to grow into responsible adults knowing the difference between right and wrong - and with that knowledge to act accordingly. So before we look at sin's consequences let us ask a question.

### WHAT IS SIN?

One dictionary describes it as '**transgression of the law of God, moral depravity, to depart from the path of duty prescribed by God.**' That just about sums up the word '**sin**', a word many prefer not to use today. As far as most people are concerned, it has no part in their life. For those who are students of the Bible, accepting God as the Creator of the universe, the path of duty prescribed by God is very much part of their lives and we need to put right the wrong.

But then as we said at the beginning, we are responsible for our own actions. So we need to ask ourselves a number of questions:

- Why do we sin against God?
- What are the consequences?
- Can we do anything about our destiny?
- What does God require from us?
- What is God's reward for our perseverance?

### WHY DO WE SIN AGAINST GOD?

To answer this question, we need to go back to the beginning, to the first book of the Bible. In the book of Genesis, we are told how and why sin entered into God's creation. Here in this record we see that after their creation, our first parents were living in a paradise called the Garden of Eden, together with all the animals that came under their dominion and care.

You could say that our first parents were like innocent children, without a care in the world, without tried or tested characters. This record tells us that the time came when God decided to test them. We read how they were given a command from God:

‘And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “from every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat the fruit of it you shall surely die”’ [Genesis 2.16,17 NKJV]

We can see how Adam and Eve were now having their characters tested, a simple restriction placed on them by God, a restriction we might place on a child of our own. How long they refrained from taking the fruit of this tree we don't know.

Now we see that the idea of disobeying God's command was put to them by an outside agent:

'Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat from every tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat of it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' And the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.' [Genesis 3.1-6 NKJV].

God had created the earth 'very good' [Genesis 1.31]. God's creation was not made perfect. He gave Adam and Eve a choice. They were not made like robots but had been given the ability to discern between right and wrong. They chose to do wrong and as a result God put a curse upon mankind:

'Then to Adam he said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying 'You shall not eat from it: 'Cursed is the ground for your sake ...In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.' [Genesis 3. 17-19 NKJV].

We see that God gave man in the Garden of Eden a law. As with all laws, if they are broken, there is a penalty to pay. With God there is no hiding, hoping no one will see. Adam and Eve deceived themselves with that thought put in their minds by the serpent. In turn Adam blamed Eve, and Eve tried to blame the serpent for their disobedience. *'Then the man said, " The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit of the tree, and I ate." And the Lord God said to the woman, " What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me and I ate"'* [Genesis 3.12,13 NKJV].



It was no good blaming the serpent; he was merely the agent for putting the idea into their minds. The fault lay with them and them alone. It was their own thinking that was wrong. The Bible clearly tells us how the human mind works:

‘But each one is tempted when he (or she) is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death’ [*James 1.14,15 NKJV*].

The Bible teaching here tells us clearly that man was made of the dust of the earth. Because of this sin of Adam all mankind come under the penalty of the broken law. The punishment passed by God affects all of us. All grow old and die. All living creatures would in due time go to the grave. This has been the lot of all mankind. All come under this law of sin and death.

And so we read, ‘...*through one man Adam, sin entered the world...and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned*’ [*Romans 5.12 NKJV*]. We all by birth possess the same nature as Adam and therefore inevitably we all disobey God. Having considered the reasons why we sin we must consider the next question.

### WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES?

Sin is transgression of God’s law and the consequence is death. Like Adam and Eve not one of us is perfect. We all sin for it is part of our very nature inherited from our first parents. As a result we will suffer the same consequences: “...*till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken, For dust you are, and to dust you shall return*” [*Genesis 3.19*].

When we think of the consequences it is daunting for man, who on his own, is in a very sorry state. The consequence of sin is very serious for the whole human race. The wise man Solomon expressed it like this:

‘This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead’ [*Ecclesiastes 9.3*].

## CAN WE DO ANYTHING ABOUT OUR DESTINY?

God is a merciful God and has not, as he could have done so early on, left mankind to his destiny. However the Scriptures remind us that in the beginning steps were taken to prevent the earth being populated by a race of immortal sinners.

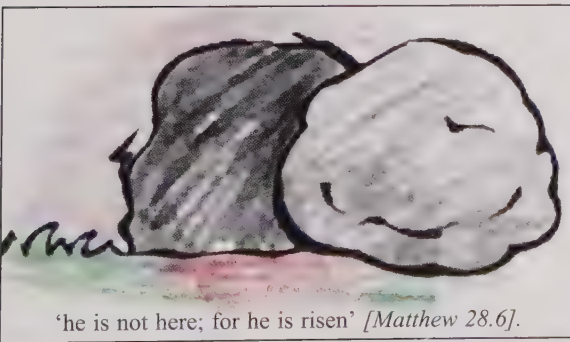
‘Then the LORD God said, “Behold the man has become like one of us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he...take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever” - therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken’ [Genesis 3.23,24].

So man was driven out of the Garden of Eden, barred from eating of the tree of life - no longer worthy to commune with God. God was displeased with man for He had not created him without a purpose.

Despite mankind’s fall from grace God had a plan to redeem His creation from the very beginning. He has, through his Son Jesus Christ, opened a way back to the tree of life (see Revelation 2.7) through the forgiveness of sins. Mankind left to his own devices would live his life and eventually go to an eternal grave. In the Bible we find two simple but far-reaching statements:

‘For the wages of sin is death’. [Romans 6.23]

‘For as in Adam all die’ [1 Corinthians 15.22].



‘he is not here; for he is risen’ [Matthew 28.6].

If you look up these two verses you will notice that we have stopped half way through. Why? Because we want to emphasize that God has invited us to share in a hope - a hope of eternal life. If we read right through those verses we get the whole picture:

‘For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.’

‘For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.’

Here we are reminded how the dreadful effects of Adam’s transgression of God’s law have been overcome by God’s only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ – the only man who was able to control those evil thoughts which lead us to sin. His death and resurrection were the guarantee that God’s plan for the redemption of the human race would be accomplished.

If we read on in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians we are told how this will come about: *‘But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.’ [1 Corinthians 15.23 N.I.V.]*

As we said, all mankind has sinned against God since creation, but there was an exception. To give mankind a hope of salvation from sin and death, God had to intervene in the normal course of events. In due time he sent his Son, Jesus Christ who was born of Mary a member of the human race, a descendant of Adam, taking on our nature as the following verses remind us:

‘But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law’ [*Galatians 4.4,5 NKJV*].

‘Therefore, in all things he had to be made like his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people’ [*Hebrews 2.17 NKJV*].

Although he was of our nature, Jesus still had that same choice to obey or disobey. However he resisted temptation and sin and his character was faultless. He gave his life for mankind as we read in Hebrews: *‘So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many’ [Hebrews 9.28]*. But on the third day he rose again.

As Paul reminds us, Jesus was the *‘firstfruits’*, the first to rise from the dead to eternal life. In a natural sense the firstfruits are then followed by the main crop. As with the natural harvest so with the spiritual harvest. It



follows that in time, a much greater harvest is expected to follow. There will be many more 'fruits' to be harvested *'when he (Jesus) comes.'* God in his purpose through his son Jesus Christ has invited you and I to share this wonderful hope for the future.

Yes, God's purpose from creation was to send his Son. It was necessary for Jesus to be born under the Law. Through his mother Mary he had human nature - he had the ability to sin. He was tempted like ourselves, even like Adam and Eve were, but the difference was that he led a sinless life. Through his death and resurrection he has opened the way to a new life for all who are obedient to the Divine requirements.

### WHAT DOES GOD REQUIRE FROM US?

To be released from the consequences of sin we need to do something. The choice as it has always been, is ours. God wants our response to His calling. We need to have faith and to be baptised into Christ.

Baptism is not a ritual; it comes after a confession of our faith. It acknowledges our position before God as sin-stricken beings; it is only through obedience to God that we can have hope. Baptism is the way provided by God for men and women to be related to the one hope centred in the Lord Jesus Christ – there is no other way to escape the consequences of sin.

Through the waters of baptism we are buried with Christ as Paul wrote to the Colossians: *'buried with him in baptism, in which you also were raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses.. He has made alive together with him'* [Colossians 2.12,13]. Our past sins are washed away and we start a new life in Christ. This doesn't mean that we sin no more - far from it. However we have acknowledged in the God given way our dependence upon the forgiveness available through the work of Christ. This brings us to the final question:

### WHAT IS GOD'S REWARD FOR PERSEVERANCE?

Paul, writing to the early believers in Rome, speaks of the risen Lord in this way:

‘Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over him...Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord’ [Romans 6.8-11 NKJV].

Paul in this passage speaks of one who died, not one who is dead. He reminds his readers of Christ who died to sin once and for all. As we said, through baptism we acknowledge our hopeless position but we also acknowledge that God has opened a way to eternal life.

To summarise, we see sin is inherited in our nature. The consequences of staying in sin are death - that’s why we all die. But God, in His love and mercy, has provided a way for each man and woman to be released from this bondage. There is only one way, God’s way, through His Son, Jesus Christ. Peter expressed the wonderful provision of God like this: *‘knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold...but with the precious blood of Christ’* [1 Peter 1.18,19]. No amount of wealth can release us from the consequences of sin, this can only come about by associating ourselves with the redemptive work of Christ.

Although we may die before the return of Christ, God has given us a guarantee - *‘Christ the firstfruits’*. The promise to us is the resurrection of our bodies from the grave just as Christ was raised from the grave to eternal life. This is the reward, in God’s mercy for all those who truly seek to serve Him.

We each have a choice. We can live our lives ignoring the consequences of sin that leads ultimately to death, or alternatively we can strive to follow the path of duty prescribed by God in the Bible.

What will you do?

Michael Baker  
West Sussex, England



## From our Mail Bag

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OUR READERS OFTEN ask this question: 'Is there an immortal soul which goes to heaven when we die?'

Many men and women, religious or not, believe in an ever living soul which departs from the body at the moment of death. This question is often raised at the time of bereavement, by people searching for an answer to comfort them at a particularly distressing time. The truth is not always a comfort to those who want to know what the Bible teaches.

Let us ask the question. If Adam and Eve already had immortal souls, why would they have been '*sent out*' of the Garden of Eden to stop them living forever? [Genesis 3.22,23 NKJV]. Also if they had possessed immortal souls, the threatened punishment for disobedience spoken to Adam, '*you shall surely die,*' [Genesis 3.17 NKJV] would have been of no avail. It also means that the serpent's suggestion that they would not die would have been correct.

Immortality is a gift from God, a reward given to the obedient through righteousness. '*To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life:* [Romans 2.7]. Immortality is to be sought after. If we already have an immortal soul, which goes to heaven, why would there be a need for judgement?

Think about Lazarus that dear friend of Jesus who died. When Jesus came to Bethany, he didn't comfort Martha with words about her brother's '**soul**' having gone to '**heaven**'. Instead he said '*Thy brother shall rise again.*' Martha saith to him, '*I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day*' [John 11.23,24] The Scriptures tell us that Christ will come again at the last day, and bring his reward with Him. [1Corinthians 15: 21-23].

The Apostle Paul wrote '*if after the manner of men I have fought with*

*beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? [1Corinthians 15:32]. If the soul is immortal (and can be separated from the body to live in heavenly bliss) why does Paul say 'if the dead rise not'? Why the concern for the body if the soul can enjoy bliss without the body?*

The reference to the death of Jacob's wife Rachel is sometimes quoted by readers: *'And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin [Genesis 35.18].* There is a suggestion here of Rachel's soul departing at death to somewhere else. The normal acceptance is that 'somewhere,' means 'heaven' or 'hell'. We would respond by saying there is no suggestion here of an immortal soul, or of another place for departed souls. The phrase 'immortal soul' cannot be found in the Bible. In no way does this verse imply that her soul went to heaven, hell or anywhere else. The expression means simply, that Rachel's life was ebbing away.

The word 'soul' as used in the Bible, is a translation from the original languages of the Old and New Testaments ( O.T. Hebrew - 'nephesh' and N.T. Greek -'psuche'). We find these two words are translated in the Scriptures in different ways such as, 'body', 'breath', 'person', 'himself', 'creature', 'heart' and 'mind'. So all these descriptions of the soul refer to the human makeup that is destroyed at death. The Psalmist describes the moment of death very bluntly: *'His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish' [Psalm 146.4].*

Many passages are quoted in the Bible to describe death as a sleep. This was just how Jesus described the death of Lazarus as he lay in the tomb. He said to his disciples: *'Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may wake him out of sleep...but they thought he had spoken of taking rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.'* [John 11.11-14] This is the death state we all eventually succumb to.

But there is this wonderful hope. The prophet Daniel wrote about a time when *'Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.'*[Daniel 12.2] These words open a way to a full appreciation of the Bible hope of resurrection from the dead, the original and true Christian hope.

Correspondence Secretary



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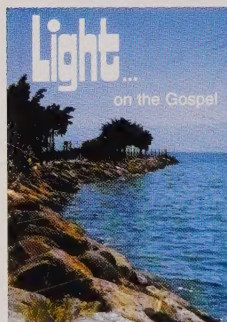


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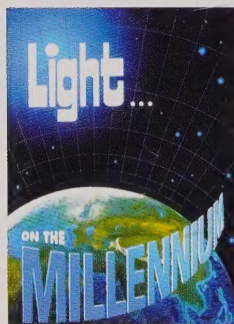


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